

Times Your Community

Leading by example

By Councilmember Rose Herrera

Special to the Times

Now that the severity of the budget deficit facing the City of San Jose is painfully clear, let's focus on how our lives in District 8 could be affected in the coming year if we are not able to achieve the savings through workforce concessions or other solutions. This year's \$116 million general fund budget deficit is much worse than in previous years, and the budget reduction proposals required to close this deficit will have a very significant impact on the city's workforce and on the services used by our community.

More than 500 jobs will be affected and dozens of valuable programs will be cut if we cannot close this gap through wage concessions, structural deficit changes and alternative service delivery. I'm still hopeful that concessions will come from all bargain-ing units, not just those with open con-tracts. I further believe that it is still possi-ble to work with our employees to achieve a solution. We have an incredibly talented and valuable workforce that delivers superi-or services to our community.

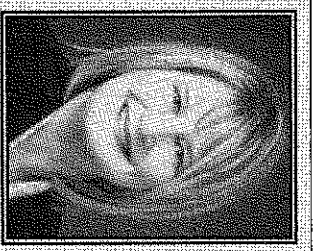
We, as city leaders, must do what is right for the greater community and the strength of the organization. By taking pay cuts, jobs and services will be spared. I, along with my council colleagues, took a 3.75 percent wage cut last year. This year, we are leading by example and again voted to take a pay cut.

This time it's a 10 percent total cut for the mayor and council. I know it is not easy to live on less than you planned. But that is what needs to be done. As an organization, we must all make sacrifices for the good of San Jose and the residents we serve.

In addition, the unrepresented employ-ees, this includes my staff and the executive management of the city, will be taking a 5 percent total compensation reduction and we are pursuing another 5 percent before the end of the fiscal year. My staff feels it is an honor and a privilege to serve the residents of this city and despite being paid \$30,000 less than the average city employee, under-stands this must be done.

In light of the cuts we are all taking, I will fight to protect everything I can for the resi-dents of District 8. Because service cuts will be felt by all corners of the city, it is imper-ative that any cuts make sense for both the city's bottom line and the quality of life of resi-dents. The proposals from the City Manager are based on the best current options avail-able. If the City Manager is able to achieve concessions, it will reduce the number of reductions that are needed. This means that some of the cuts mentioned below will not happen.

The service cuts I talk about below will happen if the city is not able to reach con-cessions totaling 10 percent, 5 percent in ongoing total compensation reduction and another 5 percent in either ongoing or one-



District 8 Report
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City Councilmember

time savings. Last week, we reluctantly voted to impose wage concessions on one of the labor unions. It is not how we want to close this budget gap.

Below I profile how service cuts will look to just one department, Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services. These cuts will affect our way of life in San Jose. But if we are able to get wage concessions then the jobs and these services could be spared.

District 8 is home to several beautiful parks and trails that are well-used. Under the most recent budget scenario, trails such as the Silver Creek Valley Trail will no longer have dedicated Park Ranger staffing, with only periodic ranger visits proposed. Regional parks, such as Lake Cunningham, may be maintained at the cur-rent levels only during the busy summer months from April to September. Neighborhood parks may experience similar reduced maintenance schedules, but these proposals are still under review and subject to City Council approval.

If concessions and one-time savings are not achieved, major changes are likely to come in 2010-2011 to San Jose's libraries and community centers. Library branch hours will be curtailed drastically, with the Evergreen and Hillview libraries slated to open just three days a week. Homework Center programs may be discontinued. Reductions to services of community cen-ters, including District 8's Evergreen

Community Center, affect sports and athlet-ic programs. Millbrook Community Center is facing closure.

Though the outlook feels grim, specific city services will not be affected. The Anti-Graffiti Program, tasked with removing unsightly graffiti, is expected to continue its work. The SFPD Crime Prevention Unit won't reduce services, making sure that San Jose remains one of the safest big cities in the country. Environmental initiatives, sewer improvements and water pollution control programs continue as planned, pro-tecting San Jose's hard-earned "Green" rep-utation.

As I mentioned before, balancing the budget means tough choices on the services we provide. Our partner in curbing blight, Code Enforcement, is also facing cuts. The good news for residents is that we can still expect quick resolution for priority com-plaints. Response time for routine com-plaints will increase to 15 days, 50 percent longer than the current 10-day turnaround. The Blight Buster city-citizen partnership program and the West Evergreen Strong Neighborhood Initiative Area program will continue.

The city's budget for 2010-2011 is not yet final. My goal is to protect District 8's most vital interests as the City of San Jose contin-ues to struggle with severe budgetary con-straints. E-mail district8@sanjoseca.gov or call (408) 535-4908 to share your specific budget concerns as we continue to address our unprecedented budget deficit crisis.

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